

# Coronavirus-Induced Shift in Classroom Discourse: A Linguistic Study of Blended Learning in Nigeria

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## Abstract

*A major impact of COVID-19 in the educational sector in Nigeria is the expansion of interactive space. Web-based teaching and learning have risen exponentially owing to the risks associated with traditional discourse modes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, virtual classrooms have become a child of necessity to sustain and maintain safety while learning. In Nigeria, the directive by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the strict enforcement of the “stay-at-home” rule made it almost impossible for traditional face-to-face classroom engagement to continue. As a result, a hybrid approach was adopted with emphasis however on web-based teaching. The study used both quantitative and qualitative method to examine the discursive shifts in learning experience and modality of communication induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study interpreted the data using simple percentages and Gualberto and Kress’ Social Semiotic Literacy Theory. Findings from this study revealed that the digital learning has linguistically enhanced students’ literacy skills and the several challenges encountered during the digital learning process were predicated on the inadequacy of infrastructure and subsequently led to health monitored and safeguarded face-to-face learning. The paper concluded that there is a significant shift in learning mode during COVID-19 from traditional classroom to digital learning. It also purported that these platforms have impacted teaching and learning outcomes for college students in a developing country such as Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Blended learning, Classroom Discourse, Coronavirus-Induced Shift, Health Monitored and Safeguarded Face-to-Face Learning, Semiotic Literacy Theory

## Introduction

For the past two years, the discourse of COVID-19 has proliferated the Internet and enjoyed much exploration from researchers of different academic domains. This over-concentrated attention underscores the social relevance of COVID-19 and brings to prominence its ubiquitous awareness around the world. The upsurge of the COVID-19 pandemic has generated sundry epistemic contextualization. This assertion corroborates Fawunmi and Ogundare’s (2021, p. 193) claim that:

...scholarship in humanities, within the next decade, will continue to unravel the social implicative dimensions of

COVID (Coronavirus Disease) within the human social structure from polemical debates. This is not unconnected to the proliferation of COVID discourses on the media either through verbal or visual signifiers and other semiotic artifacts.

To justify Fawunmi and Ogundare's (2021) assertion, Yu, Lu and Hu (2021) note that COVID-19 discourses exist in two components: first, the discourse analysis of COVID-19 topics on several social media platforms; and second, the analysis of COVID-19 news discourses on the media. The present study is predicated on the first assumption. Therefore, it is tailored to suit the discursive issues that concern teaching and learning during COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria.

Linguistic coinages such as “new normal”, “face mask”, “face shield”, “isolation center”, “lockdown”, “physical distancing”, “wash your hands frequently under running water”, “sneeze or cough into your elbow”, “sore throat and difficulty breathing”, “avoid hand-shakes and crowded spaces”, “first and second dose vaccine, and “work from home” characterize COVID-19 discourse. The global pandemic introduced a major shift in the way communication is both packaged and received. In formal institutions such as education, approaches to learning have become more digitalized and innovative as the cyber sphere is more than ever vibrant, engaging and highly discursive. The pandemic-induced technology revolution of the twenty-first century has both opened up fresh dimensions of classroom discourse and also increased the frustrations of participants, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria.

While digital communication is not new, its global usage to facilitate remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is not very popular. Online discourse as marked by the absence of physical shared space, and body language feedbacks; technical interference, environmental distractions and variation in competence level of most users hiccups the smooth running of the cyber engagement. The migration from the four-wall classroom to the online sphere has reshaped educational discourse from the traditional face-to-face or life-on-life remote learning model to the digital mediated mode. The use of technology to deliver lecture materials in forms of graphics, images, videos or sound texts makes classroom discourse interesting to language researchers.

Remote teaching and learning can take various forms ranging from WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to YouTube and be supported by different systems and applications. It can be referred to as e-learning, blended learning or mobile learning (Ewelina

Zarzycka, Joanna Krasodomska, Anna Mazurczak-Mąka & Monika Turek-Radwan, 2021). The evolution of on-classroom as an alternative to sustain learning activities during the COVID-19 pandemic has posed a lot of challenges to both learners and facilitators in an attempt to align with the *new normal*. This is because media-mediated discourse is premised on the assumption that actors are socialized in diverse forms and to certain degrees to participate in the discourse systems adopted for learning. Since the most relevant function of language in learning activity is information transmission usually intentionally packaged and time-bound by a facilitator or group of facilitators to specific recipients called learners, the relationship between education and language is therefore symmetrical. In the regular classroom exchange, meaning is generated from complex modes ranging from facial expressions, gestures, voice quality, tone, and images to spoken and written texts. Also, the facilitator harvests immediate and multiple feedbacks which sometimes necessitate modification of style, technique, environment or message communicated to ensure effective learning.

Within the Nigeria, system, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a blended learning system. First, institutions engage e-learning method in order to abide by the safety rules and precautions. Second, institutions have also re-engineered the face-to-face method by keeping to the social distancing rules and other COVID-19 health guidelines. This blend is necessary for a country such as Nigeria, to remedy the dysfunctional socio-political system where there is a lack of basic infrastructure and to ensure learning is not jeopardized. Therefore, this study painstakingly examines these shifts qualitatively and quantitatively. This blended methodological strategy makes this study different from other studies (see Dhawan, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Radha, R., Mahalakshmi, K., Kumar, V., & Saravanakumar, A., 2020; Ikwuka, O. I., Okoye, A. C., Olanikawu, S. A., Udenwa, V. C., Okoye, C. C., & Ikwuka, D. C., 2021; Olayemi, O., Adamu, H., & Olayemi, K., 2021; The Education Partnership Centre, 2021; Egielewa, P., Idogho, P., Iyalomhe, F., & Cirella, G., 2022) on COVID-19 induced shift in the educational domain. To this end, since human communication is intrinsically embedded in language use which is a functional tool in learning processes, this study examines the discursive shifts in learning experience and modality of communication induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, it seeks to address the following objectives which are to:

- i. determine the level of students' participation, challenges and opportunities associated with digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic;

- ii. measure the impact of COVID-19 induced shift to digital learning on classroom discourse; and
- iii. analyze and interpret the verbal and visual signifiers related to COVID-19 discourse within the Nigerian educational context.

## Literature Review

### COVID-19 Pandemic and Shift in Classroom Learning Mode

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) is an infectious disease caused by respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe respiratory difficulties. “It originated from the Hunan seafood market at Wuhan, China where live bats, snakes, raccoon dogs, wild animals among others were sold in December 2019” (Shereen, Khan, Kazml, Bashir, & Siddique 2020, p. 93) and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020 (WHO, 2020). Since its identification, the virus is said to have accounted for about 6,539,058 deaths globally out of a swooping statistic of 619,770,633 positive cases which sadly increases exponentially daily (WHO, 2022). Fawunmi and Ogundare’s (2021, p. 197) give the following narratives to reflect on the shift in the society as induced by COVID-19:

...the effect (of COVID-19) has caused a bipolar transformation within the societies of the world. On the one hand, the pandemic exposes nations where the government makes no adequate and strategic plans for growth and development: the effect of the virus has caused them more harm because citizens in such nations now battle between *hunger virus* and coronavirus disease. This situation is typology of African societies where bribery and corruption, political instability, favoritism, money laundering and other political vices are legalized. On the other hand, the pandemic humiliates and disdains the knowledge and wisdom of most advanced countries of the world where all manners of abnormalities and bestialities thrive. This situation is typology of many European and Asian countries. The equal effect of the pandemic is that it held the socio-political activities of the world to a standstill and also shifted the attention of everyone, irrespective of the social status, to itself.

Fawunmi and Ogundare's claim shows that almost every sector in the society has been affected by Coronavirus. Without doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused serious changes in the educational landscape affecting 94% of the world's student population in more than 190 countries (UNESCO, 2020). Globally, the pandemic has either rebranded the packaging and delivery of educational needs to a more digitalized commodity or pragmatically caused a necessary shift in learning modes as opposed to the traditional system of a four-walled classroom. In Nigeria, the lockdown imposed by the Federal Government migrated learning activities of higher institutions to remote service delivery in compliance with the COVID-19 directive. However, owing to lack of infrastructural facilities that could enhance e-learning, schools and institutions have developed several procedures to re-establish face-to-face learning to reinforce the e-learning studies. This claim has statistical evidence as given by Egielewa, et al., (2022).

It would not be an overstatement to assert that technology has unequivocally revolutionized the world since the advent of COVID-19. According to Regmi and Jones (2020), online teaching and learning is an educational technique that supports learning via the application of information technology and communication, providing learners with access to all needed education programs. Web-based learning, online learning or education, computer-assisted or aided teaching, computer-based teaching, internet-based learning, multimedia learning, and e-learning have all been used interchangeably. In the context of this study, online teaching and learning refer to a technique of instruction and knowledge acquisition carried out in the educational environment using computers, smart phones and other technology over the internet (Mathew & Iloanya, 2016). As indicated by Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), effective online education happens only when there are online teaching and learning tools, devices and application.

Since the success of information system is determined by how people use it, the technical infrastructure, availability of data, access to the internet, knowledge of ICT, level of dexterity on the manipulation digital tools such as smart phones, computer and different software applications like WhatsApp, Zoom, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram and Google meet, and effective training of resource persons and facilitators are the most essential factors that could enhance effectiveness.

### **Theoretical Approach: Social Semiotics**

Social semiotics is a subfield of semiotics which stemmed from Halliday's (1978) *Social Semiotic* view which holds that language is functional. Halliday (1978) argues that language is governed by three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. The ideational function is used to represent the speaker's experience of the real world, including the inner world of his own consciousness. The interpersonal function includes language resources for constructing roles between the senders' expression of judgment and predictions. Finally, the textual metafunctions draw on the resources of language to create cohesion.

Theoretically, social semiotics is a methodological framework for the study of the human signifying practices in which communicators engage for the purpose of social action in a given sociocultural context (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001, 2006; van Leeuwen 2005, Kress, 2003). The approach focuses on the process through which individuals, groups, and institutions make meaning. Specifically, semiotics investigates how communicators use available systems of signs to produce coherent messages that represent and communicate particular social relationships, identities, and worldviews (Kress, 2010). By redefining semiotic systems from linguistic structures to semiotic resources, social semiotics investigates a range of social interactions; meaning is realized in different forms, which can be visual, linguistic, auditory, digital, kinesthetic, and so on. In all instances, the research inquiry presupposes that semiosis or the process of meaning-making is praxis: a purposive social activity whose discursive effects can be identified and explained through the systematic description and analysis of semiotic resources that communicators have at their disposal and use in specific social situations.

Different theorists have established various schematizations for doing socio-semiotics; however, this study deploys Gualberto and Kress' (2018, pp. 4-5) Social Semiotic Literacy Theory which argues that:

...under a social semiotic perspective, meaning is the outcome of a response to the prompt of a social agent (the rhetor) whose meanings are given semiotic articulation by a designer, and made material by a producer. Most frequently these three roles / positions are merged in one person. The rhetor / designer / producer orchestrates modes and other non-material semiotic resources to produce texts-as-prompts, motivated by the interest of the rhetor, in a given moment and environment. When

producing a text, the rhetor / designer carefully assesses the environment: “What is the world, for and in which I am to design my prompt?” “What do I want to achieve?”; ... and the resources: “what semiotic resources are available to me, and how will they serve my aims?”.

The narratives posit that to make meaningful interpretation, semiotic is a complex system which involves a range of questions. Knowing this will aid proper understanding and interpretation of social situations. Since social semiotics covers a whole range of texts, Gualberto and Kress (2018) dwell on semiotic interpretation of interactive phenomena by citing examples of learning situations. They observe that:

Learning is semiotic work. Work involves a worker, tools and something worked on. Work produces change; and change is meaningful. Every use of semiotic tools – literacy included – involves the semiotic work of social agents; and that produces change in meaning. Every time someone designs a message, assembling semiotic resources, she or he is involved in semiotic work which produces a semiotic change, with social effects. The emphasis on work in social semiotics, is at the same time an emphasis on the social agents who do the work.

Their social semiotic framework on literacy really captures the essence of this study. Also, the theory provides a difference from other studies on COVID-19 induced shift in Nigerian educational domain.

### **Materials and Methods**

The study employed a qualitative and quantitative descriptive approach. The target population for the study was the undergraduate students of the Faculties of Art, Education, Management Sciences, and Social Sciences of the University of Lagos, Nigeria. The institution is chosen because it is situated within Lagos State - the epicenter of the Coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria. Also, it is a major entry point and the economic capital of Nigeria. To achieve objectives one and two, the study employed an online survey using Google Form. The link to the form was made available to the target students using their WhatsApp platform. This method was adopted to enhance easier and safe collection and harvesting of data. Also, it was considered to be more cost effective, time saving and accurate

with respect to statistical analysis. A simple random sampling technique was employed to select 400 respondents including male and female but only 211 students filled the form, therefore constituting the population for this study. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first part containing 4 items seeks to explore the demographic profile of the respondents which featured options to pick from and short answers. The second part containing 11 items explores communication opportunities for classroom interchange in the tertiary institution as well as the level of participation, and preparation for online classes induced by the pandemic shift during the COVID-19 pandemic. These items were polarized in a “yes/no” format. Students were asked to answer several questions related to expertise, anxiety and frustration, preferences, weaknesses, and to assess level of effectiveness of digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This third aspect featured six questions and explored the five- points Likert scale ranging format as well as options to choose from. The fourth part of the questionnaire focused on classroom impacts such as creativity and innovation by facilitators, and learning outcomes. The three questions in this unit also deploy variants of the Likert scale format to derive answers. The fifth and final part of the questionnaire which contains 2 items were the open-ended questions aimed at eliciting the perception of students on relevant issues. This aspect was structured to feature the short answers from respondents. The researchers also analyzed the verbal items and visual images using Gualberto and Kress’ Social Semiotic Literacy Theory. The images were representations of the alternative method of maintaining face-to-face lectures during the new normal era.

## **Results and Discussions**

This section shows both numeric and linguistic evidence of data harvested for COVID-19-induced shift for blended learning in Nigeria. It is structured into two parts – 5.1 and 5.2 respectively. Item 5.1 features the quantitative analysis while item 5.2 shows the qualitative analysis which is further sub-grouped into verbal features (5.2.1) and visual analysis (5.2.2). The numeric values are supportive empirical evidence for the study while the verbal and visual data provide discursive evidence for classroom communication in the tertiary institution during the novel COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.



### 5.1 Quantitative Analysis

This unit features the frequency rate of various occurrences, their averages and percentages. A simple mean deviation was used to analyze the data over a 100 percentage from the raw score.

Section 1: Demographic profile of the respondents.

(1) Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	135	63.98%
Male	76	38.02%

(2) Age range	Frequency	Percentage
16-20	97	45.97%
21-25	109	51.66%
26-30	5	2.40%

(3) Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Arts	8	3.79%
Education	5	2.37%
Management Sciences	195	92.42%
Social Sciences	3	1.42%

(4) Year	Frequency	Percentage
2	91	43.13%
3	23	10.9%
4	97	45.97%

A descriptive statistical analysis was employed to measure the respondents' demographic profiles in terms of frequency and percentage. The distribution of each item in the demographic profile of the respondents has been presented in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4. Table 1 illustrates the gender of the respondents. 76 (38.02%) were male (63.98%) were female. This is either suggestive of the gender disparity on the campus or depicts the female gender as more collaborative and cooperative with reference to data sourcing for research purposes. 97 respondents were aged from 16-20; 109 respondents were aged from 21-25; and only 5 respondents were aged from 26-30. This frequency indicates that the highest range of respondents was those from ages 21-25 which constitutes a total of 51.66% of the distribution. This age range is highly significant because it indicates maturity and young adulthood. Thus, it can be said that the data provided by this group is rational, reliable and largely objective. There were 8 respondents (3.79%) from the faculty of Arts, 5 (2.37%) from the faculty of education 195 (92.42%) from the faculty of Management Sciences, and 3

(1.42%) from Social Sciences. The variance in this sample is largely traceable to willingness of the respondents to participate in the survey, and social influence of the researchers and research assistant. 91 (43.13% ) were 200 level students, 23(10.9 %) were from 300 level, while 97(45.97%) were 400 level students. This is purposely done to ensure that only the students who were in session during the COVID-19 pandemic and are currently students of the University of Lagos from the selected faculties participated in the exercise.

Section 2: The 11 items for this unit are stated thus:

- i. I fully participated in the first and second semester online classes during the novel COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. The pandemic-induced shift in learning mode has opened up new communication style with respect to specific ways to how learning is achieved.
- iii. I prepared more for online classes than for the traditional face-to-face classes.
- iv. The online classroom afforded me the opportunity to communicate effectively with my instructor/facilitator.
- v. The online classroom was more comfortable than face-to-face modes of learning.
- vi. I asked more questions during online classes than face-to-face.
- vii. Online environment is safer and makes me more confident in completing group work with other learners.
- viii. Online environment promotes sufficient sharing of learning materials, closed circle community and collaborations with my course mates.
- ix. I prefer writing test and exams online.
- x. Online classes can comfortably replace face-to-face classes.
- xi.** Online/digital classroom has helped to improve my understanding of my courses during COVID-19 pandemic.

I	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	184	87.2%
No	27	12.8%

II	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	197	93.36%
No	14	6.64%

III	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	71	33.65%
No	140	66.35%

IV	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	81	38.39%
No	130	61.61%

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V	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	71	33.65%
No	140	66.35%

VI	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	87	41.23%
No	124	58.77%

VII	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	80	37.91%
No	131	62.10%

VIII	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	163	77.25%
No	48	22.75%

IX	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	139	65.88%
No	72	34.12%

X	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	95	45.02%
No	116	54.98%

XI	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	98	46.45%
No	113	53.55%

As indicated in section 2 above, table I illustrates that only 184 (87.2%) of the respondents participated fully in the online class. The 27(12.8%) respondents who could not fully participate in the cyber-class experience probably encountered one or more challenges indicated on the Google form. Some of the frequently occurring challenges include availability of data, lack of suitable devices, network issues, limited number of participants on restricted platforms (i.e. limited zoom space), little or no training on the use of devices, cyber room congestion, environmental distractions, and epileptic power supply amongst others. However, it is worthy to mention that 87.2% full participation in the digital classroom during COVID-19 in a developing country such as Nigeria is a positive indicator that the larger percentage of the country's population in college campuses are ICT compliant especially in an unplanned situation such as COVID-19.

From item II, 197 (96.3% of the) respondents agreed that the pandemic-induced shift in learning mode has opened up new communication styles with respect to specific ways to how learning is achieved. This is highly remarkable and commendable by every standard. As demonstrated on table III, only 33.65% of the respondents acknowledged that they prepared more for online classes than for the traditional face-to-face classes as against the 66.35% respondents who disagreed. This variance is largely consistent with remote learning especially when learners are not being digitally monitored or required to turn on the cameras on their devices. From the data on table IV, 61.61% of the respondents disagreed that the

cyber classroom afforded them the opportunity to communicate effectively with their instructors/facilitators. Communication is largely ineffective when there is no sufficient feedback from the recipient. This is a major challenge plaguing the practice of cyber classroom in developing African countries. For instance, the “rush” could be traced to insufficient data, frustrating network, poor power supply, etc. Little wonder only 41.23% of the respondents agreed that they were able to ask more questions during online classes than the face-to-face class method on table VI and 66.35% disagreed that the digital classroom was more comfortable compared to the traditional learning mode evident on table V. Generally, safety is one of the top reasons for the adoption of digital classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, table VII shows that 62.10% of the respondents disagreed with the suggestion that the online environment is safer for learning and makes them more confident in completing group work with other learners, leaving only 37.91% in alliance with the priority for safety. This attitudinal disregard for safety mirrors the average disposition of the Nigerian society towards COVID-19 protocols set by the NCDC. However, 77.25% agreed that the online environment promotes sufficient sharing of learning materials, closed circle community and collaborations with their course mates. Regardless of the odds, 65.88% prefer writing test and exams online while 54.98% argued that online classes cannot comfortably replace face-to-face classes with the vote by 53.55% of the respondents that digital classroom did not help to improve understanding of their courses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section 3: The six questions in this unit are:

- i. Rate your expertise on the use of digital devices for learning during COVID-19.
- ii. Identify your level of anxiety or frustration having to migrate to online classroom for lessons.
- iii. Which of these communication modes BEST satisfied classroom expectations for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- iv. Which of these communication modes LEAST satisfied classroom expectations for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- v. Options like video conferencing and screen sharing better facilitated my learning and understanding during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- vi. Would you say that the online learning mode adopted was effective in teaching courses?

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I	Frequency	Percentage
Fair	67	31.75%
Poor	8	3.79%
Proficient and versatile	49	23.22%
Skilled	83	39.33%
Very poor	4	1.90

II	Frequency	Percentage
High	38	18.00%
Low	40	18.96%
Moderate	100	47.39%
Very high	23	10.90%
Very low	10	4.74%

III	Frequency	Percentage
LMS	53	25.12%
WhatsApp	5	2.37%
YouTube	40	18.96%
Zoom	113	53.55%

IV	Frequency	Percentage
LMS	119	56.40%
WhatsApp	31	14.69%
YouTube	20	9.48%
Zoom	41	19.43%

VI	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	92	43.60%
Disagree	37	17.54%
Fairly Disagree	51	24.17%
Strongly agreed	23	10.90%
Strongly disagree	8	3.79 %

From item I above, a total of 37.44% respondents on the scale of 31.75% (fair), 3.79% (poor) and 1.90% (very poor) were not skilled on the use of digital devices for learning during COVID-19 pandemic while 62.55% on the scale of 23.22% (proficient and versatile) and 39.33% (skilled) had functional knowledge of digital devices for learning during COVID-19. This data further strengthened the argument on 4.1, section 2 that majority of Nigerian youths in tertiary institutions are ICT compliant. Item II demonstrates that 100 respondents (47.39%) experienced moderate level of anxiety and frustration having to migrate to digital classroom while 38 (18%), 40(18.96%), 23 (10.9%) and 10(4.74%) experienced high, low, very high and very low anxiety/frustration. This statistics suggests that the discourse shift to cyber-classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic is not a failure despite the challenges. Item III features the most satisfying mode of communication for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This occurred in the preponderance of zoom (53.55%), LMS

V	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	127	60.20%
Disagree	17	8.06%
Fairly Disagree	22	10.43%
Strongly agreed	40	18.96%
Strongly disagree	5	2.37%

(25.12%), YouTube (18.96%), and WhatsApp (2.37%). This demonstrates that zoom and LMS satisfied teaching and learning expectations during COVID-19 pandemic more than YouTube and WhatsApp. However, a measure of inconsistency is observed on item IV where the same group of respondents rated LMS, Zoom, WhatsApp and YouTube in the preponderance of 56.40%, 19.43%, 14.69% and 9.48%

respectively, as least satisfying for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason for this inconsistency is however beyond the scope of this study and therefore not captured.

From the data on item V, a larger percent of the population size (127 and 40 respondents totaling 79.16%) agreed that options like video conferencing and screen sharing better facilitated learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This signifies that audio-visual cyber communication facilitates teaching and learning better than mere audio or text format. Item VI further reinforces the claim that Zoom being an audio-visual mode of communication and the most preferred mode of communication during the COVID-19 was effective in teaching courses with a total of 54.5% votes (43.60% agree and 10.90% strongly agree). This therefore reinforces the claim of Opeibi (2009) that the visual communication (image texts

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and videos) arrests the attention of the target audience more effectively compared to other means of communication.

Section 4: This unit features questions such as:

- i. To what extent has the use of technology motivated facilitators/tutors/lecturers to be more creative in teaching than in a face-to-face classroom?
- ii. The lack of shared space, body language feedback and physical classroom communication negatively affected proper learning of my courses during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. As a student, learning outcomes for online exams (grading and semester scores) were better for me than pen on paper.

III	Frequency	Percentage
Fair	48	22.75%
False	40	18.96 %
Never	9	4.27 %
True	81	38.39%
Very true	33	15.64%

I	Frequency	Percentage
High	65	30.81%
Low	29	13.74%
Moderate	93	44.10%
Very high	15	7.11 %
Very low	9	4.27%

II	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	97	45.97
Disagree	43	20.38%
Fairly Disagree	43	20.38%
Strongly agree	20	9.48%
Strongly disagree	8	3.79

From the perspective of the respondents on item I, the use of technology induced by the COVID-19 pandemic has facilitated creativity and scaled up innovations with regards to how teaching and learning is achieved. 82.0% (7.11% very high, 30.81% high and 44.10% moderate) respondents agreed with this view while only 18% (4.27% very low and 13.74% low) disagreed with the view. Before this time, classroom discourse in public universities in Nigeria has been rigidly traditional with little or no digital and technological innovation, but the necessary shift to cyber classroom has opened up new medium for achieving learning and enhanced creativity by facilitators and lesson instructors. Although the respondents prefer to write test/exam online and admitted that learning outcomes with regards to grades and scores were better (54.03%: 38.39% true and 15.64 % very true –item III) during the cyber classroom interface, 55.45% agreed (9.48% strongly agree, and 45.97% agree) that lack of shared space, body language feedback and physical classroom communication negatively affected proper learning of courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contextually, this is traceable to high consumption of funds and provision of alternative infrastructure for digital access to the cyber space. For instance, learners and facilitators in most African countries power their facilities (phones and laptops) with generator which would imply extra cost. Environmental issues (insecurity, banditry, noise pollutions) and lack of basic infrastructure are also common place in Nigeria. Network issue is a major denominator that frustrates cyber classroom discourse in Nigeria.

## **Qualitative Analysis**

### **Verbal Features**

Structurally, sentences are classified into simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex or double sentences. A simple sentence has a subject and a predicate; a compound sentence consists of two or more co-ordinate clauses; a complex sentence consists of one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses while a compound-complex sentence consists of two or more main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses. Functionally, a sentence could be used to pass across information from one person to another (informing); give an order, issue a command or instruct a subordinate (commanding); elicit information (asking); express emotions such as surprise, frustration or irritation (exclaiming), or stating facts (assertion). Several factors inform the type of sentences deployed for communication. Age, status, and context (formal or informal) are most prevalent.

Generally, classroom discourse involves two groups of participants – the facilitator and the learners. The instructor or facilitator is usually of a higher status than the learners.



S/He is certified more advanced and knowledgeable than the students. This places the instructor/facilitator at a position of power and authority over the learners. From the demographic detail on 4.1, section 1, only 5 (2.40%) of the respondents are aged between 26 and 30. This implies that 206 (97.60%) of the respondents are aged between 16 and 25. By this, it can be inferred that the undergraduate students at the University of Lagos, Nigeria are basically young. Although there is no statistic proof to back up the age disparity between the students and lecturers in the tertiary institution, observation from the study shows that most of the lecturers are quite advanced in age while a few are middle-aged. The implication of age for this study lies in the justification for the deployment of certain sentence types for passing instruction and giving orders/commands in classroom discourse.

More importantly, context shapes how discourse is packaged. Classroom discourse is largely formal. Although less formal exchanges sometimes facilitate learning, factors such as age and status maintain the necessary disequilibrium and inequality to ensure proper learning especially in a highly significant cultural society such as Nigeria. In the context of this study, sentences of different degrees are deployed to give commands, ask questions, complain and state facts, inform, notify and request. Also, some of the recurring lexemes that are unique to cyber classroom (discursive and computer generated) are identified and discussed.

### **Order/command/instruction**

- i. Put on your camera, /Switch on your video.
- ii. Unmute yourself /unmute your mic.
- iii. Mute yourself /mute your mic / Please, mute yourselves.
- iv. Drop your matric number in the chat box.
- v. Put your questions in the chat box/ drop your name in the chat box.
- vi. Governor, record the class!
- vii. Mute yourself, who is that boy!!!!
- viii. Send your assignment to my email address.
- ix. Send a chat.
- x. Subscribe to my YouTube channel.
- xi. “Stop sending chats to the chat box while I am teaching, it’s distracting.”
- xii. Unmute yourself and speak
- xiii. Stop writing on the screen!

Items i-xiii above display some of the imperative sentences prevalent during the COVID-19 cyber class discourse. Since orders and instructions are usually given by a superior to a subordinate, it can be stated, therefore, that the orders, instructions and commands in this context were given by the lecturer to the students. The speaker (Lecturer) requires the learners to act in certain ways for teaching and learning to be effectively achieved. Sometimes, the learners are required to mute/unmute themselves, send a chat or perform certain tasks. Imperative sentences generally require corresponding actions from the receiver for communication to be achieved. Else, the command, instruction or order would be rendered ineffective, null and void.

### **Complaining/stating**

- i. [The] Network is bad. (facilitator/learner)
- ii. The host has not started the meeting. (learner)
- iii. We can't see your screen. (facilitator/learner)
- iv. We can't hear you. (facilitator/learner)
- v. It was a hell of an experience but we thank God in the end.  
(facilitator/learner)
- vi. "Stop sending chats to the chat box while I am teaching, it's  
distracting." (facilitator)

Sentences are sometimes utilized to express displeasure, complain, pass comments, or state facts. The speakers in this context deployed simple, compound and complex sentences to express their dissatisfaction, distress and discomfort associated with cyber classroom. The frustration experienced was metaphorically compared to "hell". This expression suggests the height of pain and comfort experienced by both participants in the attempt to ensure proper cyber classroom discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, network delays in starting a meeting, and audio-visual interruption or failure also aggravate the discomfort associated with cyber classroom, especially in technologically deficient country such as Nigeria. Another significant complaint is distraction. This is very vital and critical because it is being stated by the facilitator. By this, it can be deduced that distraction is a common factor that impedes digital learning particularly, live-on-live classes, thereby rendering cyber classroom discourse not so effective.

**Informing/notifying**

- i. Prof./Dr./Mr./Mrs. (XYZ) is inviting you to a zoom meeting.
- ii. [This is] The link for today's class.
- iii. [This is the] Meeting link.
- iv. The class is being recorded.
- v. [This/Here is the] Invite link.
- vi. [This/Here is the] Link.
- vii. [This/Here is the] Password.

One of the basic functions of communication is information dissemination. Usually, a better informed participant either generates or shares details regarding a particular subject matter with other members of the group. The content of the message could range between single word form to larger structures such as phrases, clauses and sentences. Minor sentences and ellipsis are also used to achieve brevity as it is generally assumed that members of the group have shared knowledge about the subject matter which might not be obvious to those outside the group. For instance, items iii, and v-vii are minor sentences in that they lack significant components that make up a sentence. The one-word sentence on item vi and pre-modified noun headed sentences on iii and v are examples of sentences stripped of their essential components. However, something is significant about these sentences - they make complete sense to the members of the group the message is intended to serve. Also, item iii demonstrates subject-verb ellipsis. This occurs when the subject and verb of a sentence are structurally absent without distorting meaning. Only sentences i and iv have structural markers typical of complete sentences. For instance, sentences i and iv could be analyzed thus:

S	P	c
The class	is being	recorded.

S	p	C	A	
Prof./Dr./Mr./Mrs. (XYZ)	is inviting	you	to	a meeting.
	Complex verb phrase		Prepend	Completive

Contextually, the information given by either the facilitator or the class representative is either intended to invite learners for a class, notify them of a scheduled meeting or share relevant access code for a cyber-classroom discourse.

### **Request**

- i. [Could you {please}] Make me the host/co-host
- ii. Can we get the slides, sir/ma?

One constant element in every request is that it could be either acted upon positively by the recipient (accepted) or turned down completely (rejected). This feature makes request a linguistic case of probability. However, the way a request is discursively packaged could significantly impact its chances of reception, especially in cultural, formal, and social contexts such as cyber classroom. Politeness markers such as modality (past form), “Sir/Ma”, and the lexeme ‘please’ linguistically enhance the reception of a request especially from a subordinate to a superior. It is however obvious that these elements are missing on item i. above which is suggestive that the speaker in the context is either a superior to or contemporary with the recipient. From another perspective, the missing politeness markers could be suggestive of the deficient cultural orientation of the speaker, or low proficiency of language skill.

### **Questions**

- i. Can you hear me?
- ii. Can you see my screen?
- iii. Can you hear me now?

Questions are usually asked to elicit responses, generate feedbacks or to seek clarification. Generally, question helps to reduce communication gap in discourse and ensure meaning loss is reduced. It constitutes a major aspect in teaching and learning which could be during or after teaching. Questions are also used for assessment, grading, promotion and certification. In the cyber classroom, questions are asked to ascertain the level of participation and to manage challenges that are unique to digital learning platforms. Some of these challenges could be inferred from the content of the questions such as network failure affecting sound connection, display board etc.

### **Informality in Digital Classroom**

- i. I can't hear you o!
- ii. Type in the chat box **jare!**
- iii. You have hijacked the host again o!
- iv. Log in o!

Some peculiar informal linguistic expressions reflect the socio-cultural background and/or geographical location of speakers in a strictly formal setting such as classroom discourse in Nigeria. They sometimes manifest in the form of hybridity (a kind of consistent interchange between English language and the mother tongue) or an additive closure of a sentence. From items *i-iv* above, the additive closure is employed. The linguistic imports of 'o' and 'jare' suggest both the geographical location and cultural background of the speakers. While this linguistic feature aligns with the socio-geographical location of the institution under study (being South-Western Nigeria), yet, it is not limited to the axis alone. For instance, 'ko' is an additive closure in Northern Nigeria, 'fa' is deployed in Kwara - North Central, 'eh' is common in South-South Nigeria. These linguistic additions are informal. They contextually relax the hierarchical differential in speeches and convey some sort of common ground which is atypical of a classroom discourse. These elements could also be used to show emotions (such as stress, joy, and excitement), frustration, impatience etc.

### **Linguistic Expressions Peculiar to Media Mediated Discourse**

*Zoom, host, zoom link, co-host, LMS, link, password, code*

*Log in, waiting for the host to start the meeting, meeting time elapsed, invite friends, comment section, join meeting, chat room, tap to speak, raise hand, waiting for host to let you in, connecting....., start screen sharing, turn on video, recording in*

*progress, call over internet, dial – in, admin, admit, waiting room, google meet, GMT timing*

The media mediated learning integrated with classroom discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic has expanded the linguistic scope of teaching and learning in Nigeria. Since the pandemic, some words have featured more frequently and have been observed as ‘the new normal’. Some of such words include: *zoom, host, zoom link, co-host, LMS, link, password, code*. The significance of these lexemes serves as a marker to differentiate live-on-live classroom engagement from the cyber-room class. Other unique words are media generated. These are programmed instructions or feedbacks that facilitate the usage of technology for effective communication or interaction.

### **Semiosis and COVID Protocols in Learning Environment**

According to Kress (2010), an outdoor sign is a social sign that is made based on certain motivated meaning by sign makers within a certain region through certain available resources or materials, although the meaning of this visible salience of signs in public spaces is socially dependent upon public responses and compliance. To ameliorate the infrastructural inadequacies that greeted the online learning, a face-to-face learning method was reinvigorated with special guidelines as illustrated in the image below:

**Image 1:**



Figure 1: COVID-19 protocols

Source: Anonymous- Posted on Public Online Platforms- Google Search Engine

The above image is placed at the front gate and the back entrance of the hotel. It is a sign to direct all the guests to wash their hands before entering the hotel area, complete with sets of graphics on the complete steps in COVID-19 safety protocols. The image has foregrounded its theme using various graphological aesthetics such as bolding, colors and

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graphics. The imperative expressions “Wear your facemask”, “Do a temperature check”, “Sanitize your hands...visit” and “Queue 6 feet apart” are concise and they give warnings to every member of the institutional community to take actions of responsibilities. The image shows four pictures with each displaying the visual aesthetics that corresponds with the verbal instructions. Since people value what they can see more than what they hear, the text producer also creates diverse textual politics in deploying the semiotic resources. For instance, all the images are well-foregrounded in terms of size and space. They reveal the various guidelines that all the learners must comply with to enable safe learning and interactions (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996).

The images present the right and correct manners of following safety guidelines during learning and social gathering within the new normal. Each of the instructions is connected and none must be neglected. As numbered in red ink, it shows the significance and indispensability of each of these safety protocols. To buttress this necessity, an instruction in red background is written boldly: “Welcome, please do the following before coming in”. Since it is possible for some to ignore the instructions, the text producer at the base of the image technically reveals the monitoring process of everyone. Multimodal discourse and semiotic scholars (e.g., O’Halloran, 2011; Kress, 2006, Kress & van Leeuwen 2006.) have emphasized the key functions of colors as communicative modes. Apart from conveying socio-cultural and contextual meanings, they are also visual attention grabbers strategically deployed to enhance communication. By default, humans transfer or relate previous knowledge or information about a subject matter to a new environment. This association enhances communication and helps to generate new information in the text. Three colors are generally deployed in this image. The black color is used to reveal the written instructions, the white background stands for healthy living and wholesomeness and also helps readers to easily capture what is written, and the red color is aimed to expose the danger of not walking together and by the same rules, and to capture the importance of the instructions (Olateju & Oyeboode 2014). To further show the intensification of the COVID-19 guidelines, image 2 captures its vitality within the school environment:

*Image 2:*

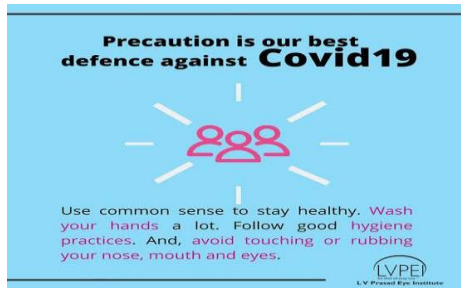


Figure 2: Prevention against COVID 19

Source: Anonymous- Posted on Public Online Platforms- Google Search Engine

The image above is another semiotic construct that brings awareness and educate the learners and academics concerning Coronavirus disease. The declarative sentence “Precaution is our best defense against COVID 19” aims to educate and inform members of the institution on the necessity to follow the necessary guidelines set up by the health officials and stakeholders. Within the statement, the word “COVID19” is foregrounded in its bold form to emphasize the enemy of the whole world and the potential destructive power the virus has. Also, using black color to foreground the virus shows it as deadly, lethal and noxious (Olateju & Oyebode 2014).

To corroborate this assertion, there is a distortion in the way the virus is written. Instead of COVID-19, we have COVID 19. This lexical distortion that seems to show the damages the virus has done to human societies around the world.

Examining the three human-like images at the center; the text producer shows the nearness of the three in a social gathering which is against the global protocol as regards COVID-19 at this period. The scattered white arrows pointing to the gathering of humans show the distance level elicited from the people when discussing in different places. To buttress the message portrayed in the picture, the text producer employs imperative sentences to charge and warn the people on the need to strictly be cautious among one another. The imperative sentences are revealed with mixed colors to indicate the different segments of people within the campus. The mentioning of the different parts of the body such as hands, eyes, nose and mouth is an instance of metonymy. The labels are created to intimate members of the campus community with human organs through which an individual can easily contract the virus.

As a color of the sky, blue represents naturalness and extends to mean modesty, confidence, regality, intelligence and conservatism. In relation to medical practices, color blue could be associated with life, health, vitality, normalcy and brightness. So, the blue color



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is an attempt to promote life, wholesomeness and healthy living of campus members. As the awareness continues to safeguard learning and promote healthy living on campus, the university provides another banner to educate members on the symptoms of COVID-19 and what should be their responsibilities:

*Image 3*



Figure 3: Symptoms of COVID-19

Source: Anonymous- Posted on Public Online Platforms- Google Search Engine

The image above itemizes the symptoms of COVID-19. In addition, it projects the contrastive ideal values of the new normal. The image is divided into 11 sections with each displaying the unacceptable values of the period. Each of these pictures graphically reveals the various manifestations of the virus. Inferentially, anyone caught with this symptom is a potential suspect to have contracted Coronavirus. This will help the people to maintain a good and personal hygiene. The adverbial clause of condition “IF YOU HAVE...” provides a warning to all university members not to hide their health status to avoid situations going worse. The poster admonishes everyone to use the cliché of the era “STAY SAFE, STAY HEALTHY”. More posters are also seen at different parts of the campus community to sensitize the students:

*Image 4:*



Figure 3: Cronavirus has gone away

Source: Anonymous- Posted at the entrance of UNILAG medical center, Nigeria

The image above reflects the various procedures, warnings, responsibilities and cautions necessary for sustaining a healthy living on campus. Carefully, the text producer reveals all these using diverse semiotic resources such as artefacts, color, attire and graphological aesthetics. Dwelling on the color, the red ink appears attractive and charming. It is used to draw attention to foregrounded information. The declarative statement “Coronavirus has not gone away” is a negation because it has undergone transformation process. This negation shows the dismemberment or mutilation that has occurred to societal relationships, policies, plans, procedures and actions. The negation could also imply the adverse effect of the virus in the learning environment and the world at large, hence, the use of red ink in capturing the message. The pragmatic import of that expression aims to restrict and limit the freedom and excesses of the campus members/people in social gatherings.

Further, the text producer engages imperative sentences “Keep your friends and family protected” and “Stay at least 1 meter apart”. These sentences are counsels and admonitions that serve as personal onus of every member in the family. To corroborate the verbal features, the text producer showcases the picture of two entities: a guy and a lady, probably lovers. This image really foregrounds the rapport that usually operates between campus guys and ladies. The image of the guy shows he sneezes with germs or viruses oozing out. Away from the guy is the lady using appropriately the face mask to protect herself against the virus. The one meter distance is identified by the space in between the tricycle wheels. The implication is that the virus has been able to disintegrate intimacy that exists among family members especially lovers and couples, teachers and students and so on.

Very obvious, most important details in the text are conveyed using the red color to signal the tremendous importance of the message, attracting readers and showing the danger involved in neglecting such message. To allay the fear of the people, the statement “spread the truth not the virus” implies that obedience to those guidelines and safety precautionary measures brings protection and immunity against the virus.

## **Conclusion**

Findings from this study revealed that the digital learning has linguistically enhanced students’ literacy skills and the several challenges encountered during the digital learning were predicated on the inadequacy of infrastructure and subsequently led to *health monitored and safeguarded* face-to-face learning. The paper concluded that there is a significant shift in learning mode during COVID-19 pandemic from traditional classroom to digital learning. It

also purported that these platforms have impacted teaching and learning outcomes for university students in a developing country such as Nigeria.

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## **Appendix: Questionnaire [Google form]**

### **Section 1**

Gender [Male] [Female]

Age [16-20; 21-25; 26-30; 31-above]

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Faculty [Arts; Education; Management Sciences; Social Science]

Year [ 2, 3,4]

### **Section 2 [YES/NO]**

- i. I fully participated in the first and second semester online classes during the novel COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. The pandemic-induced shift in learning mode has opened up new communication style with respect to specific ways to how learning is achieved?
- iii. I prepare more for online classes than for the traditional face-to-face classes?
- iv. The online classroom afforded me the opportunity to communicate effectively with my instructor/facilitator.
- v. The online classroom was more comfortable than face-to-face modes of learning.
- vi. I ask more questions during online classes than face-to-face.
- vii. Online environment is safer and makes me more confident in completing group work with other learners.
- viii. Online environment promotes sufficient sharing of learning materials, closed circle community and collaborations with my course mates.
- ix. I prefer writing test and exams online.
- x. Online classes can comfortably replace face-to-face classes.
- xi. Online/digital classroom has helped to improve my understanding of my courses during COVID-19.

### **Section 3 [Variants of Likert Scale]**

- i. Rate your expertise on the use of digital devices for learning during COVID-19.
- ii. Identify your level of anxiety or frustration having to migrate to online classroom for lessons.
- iii. Which of these communication modes BEST satisfied classroom expectations for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- iv. Which of these communication modes LEAST satisfied classroom expectations for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- v. Options like video conferencing and screen sharing better facilitated my learning and understanding during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- vi. Would you say that the online learning mode adopted was effective in teaching courses?

### **Section 4**

- i. To what extent has the use of technology motivated facilitators/tutors/lecturers to be more creative in teaching than in a face-to-face classroom?

- ii. The lack of shared space, body language feedback and physical classroom communication negatively affected proper learning of my courses during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. As a student, learning outcomes for online exams (grading and semester scores) were better for me than pen on paper.

**Section 5**

- i. List some of the lapses you experienced with respect to the use of online platforms during lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. List a few sentences/clauses/phrases/words that were unique to online/digital classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e. host, cohost, admit, zoom link, share your screen, mute yourself... etc.)